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Editorial

THE INDUCTIVE METHOD IN RELIGION

WHAT IS THE INDUCTIVE METHOD?

The inductive method seeks to arrive at general conclusions through the consideration of the specific facts. The success of the method in any given case is determined by the degree to which its use has accorded with certain requirements, viz., comprehensiveness and accuracy in observation, correct interpretation, rational explanation, and scientific construction. Has the investigator considered and accounted for all the facts? Has he seen his facts clearly and recorded their characteristics fully and accurately? Has he understood them aright in their relations one to another and to the underlying causes to which they are due? Finally, has he so co-ordinated his facts and related them to their causes that his final constructive statement corresponds to the actual reality? This, roughly speaking, is the inductive method. It finds no place for prejudice or presupposition. It allows no extraneous tradition or authority to take the place of the facts themselves. They furnish the first and the last word; they are the only fixed thing in the process; they constitute the only authority.

ITS WIDE ACCEPTANCE

The method has found practically general acceptance at the present time. Induction is the method, *par excellence*, of science. The laboratory, the experiment station, the museum, the clinic, the astronomical observatory, the scientific expedition, and other such means of discovering truth are all of them instruments of the inductive method. The wonderful progress of scientific achievement in modern times is unanimously acknowledged to be synchronous with and due to the faithful and rigid use of this method. Since its adoption by scholars in this field, science has gone forward by leaps and bounds.

The so-called "exact sciences" furnish us the best examples of the successful employment of the inductive method. But it has not stopped with these; it has forced its way into more elusive and intangible subjects. Sociology, for example, is pre-eminently an inductive study. Dealing with a relatively new science, the student of human society has practically no inheritance from the past dictating either method or conclusion. He is compelled to face the facts of life and listen for the message they have to bring. In literature and art, the realist has come to be an acknowledged force, and realism is a type of induction. Even philosophy, that most theoretical and traditional of subjects, has been compelled to acknowledge the legitimacy of the inductive method. Pragmatism is in the forefront of philosophical interest today; and pragmatism boasts of its adherence to a strictly inductive method.

THE INDUCTIVE STUDY OF THE BIBLE

In the realm of Bible-study the inductive method has come to be accepted as the true one by the large majority of present-day scholars. Even those who oppose the findings of modern historical criticism admit the legitimacy of the method by which the results have been attained. The ground of disagreement is found not in the inductive principle itself, but in the ways in which the principle is applied. Intelligent opponents of historical criticism would resent the charge that their own point of view and method were not fully as inductive as that of the most pronounced critic, which fact, incidentally, indicates that a good method wrongly applied may be productive of just as unfortunate results as a bad method. The inductive method in the hands of students well trained in historical and literary criticism has brought biblical study into a prominence it perhaps never before enjoyed. The Bible has become a new book for large numbers of people. Many for whom the reading of it had become a mechanical or ritualistic exercise attended by no real quickening of spiritual power, when made acquainted with the real men and women who live and move in the pages of the Old and New Testaments and enabled to appreciate fully and sympathetically the burdens they bore and the problems they faced, have received a new increment of zeal for the study of the Bible, and have come to look upon it as indeed

the Book of Books. Students can never again look upon the Bible as an uninteresting book after they have come to know Hosea, the broken-hearted, as he brings forth from his bitter experience words of warning and reproof for his beloved nation; Ezekiel, standing upon the ruins of Israel's national hopes and striving to lay the foundations for a new theocracy; the Maccabean brothers, opposing a firm front to the assaults of heathendom that threatened to sweep away the religion of Jehovah; or Paul, the missionary of the cross, laboring with unremittent zeal for the furtherance of the gospel, and pausing now and again to send back by letter to the churches he himself had founded, words of guidance and cheer. Its men and women become real personalities struggling toward a fuller life and seeking a better knowledge of God just as do godly men and women of every age. The task of their day is seen to be the same in kind as the task of this age; the struggle that absorbed their enthusiasm and energy is still with us; and the achievements they made it is ours to possess, only that we too may achieve and hand down to posterity. This new appreciation of the Bible is bound to win more and more enthusiastic followers; and it is safe to say even now, that the Bible was never so well understood as it is today. For this, the inductive method is chiefly responsible.

THE INDUCTIVE METHOD IN THEOLOGY AND RELIGION

Having admitted the inductive principle into so many departments of thought and life, can we draw a line before that of theology and religion and say to the oncoming invader, "Thus far shalt thou come and no farther"? Is there any ground upon which the advocates of such a policy can stand? Must not religion and theology submit themselves freely and fully to as thorough tests as are applied in any other sphere? Is there any plea of privilege that can be accepted as exempting this domain from the most searching investigation? Is there any danger that that which is really religious will fail to stand any and all tests? Is it probable that a method which has wrought so effectively in other closely related fields of human interest will break down or work disaster when put in operation here?

What does it mean to admit the inductive principle into the realm of theology and religion? Does it involve throwing overboard every-

thing we have received from the past and starting out afresh in search of a new cargo? Must each one investigate for himself the fundamental and primary grounds upon which his religious experience and theological formulas are based? Is nothing to be taken for granted?

It is certainly incumbent upon every man to be able to give a reason for the faith that is in him. Moreover, certain essential facts of religious experience must be vitally known by each man for himself; no other's knowledge or experience can do service for him. But, on the other hand, no man or group of men can afford to be wholly dissociated from the past experience of the race. It is our privilege to start, if we will, a little farther along than our fathers did in the search for truth and life. We need not travel over again the whole rough road along which previous generations have come. The errors and successes of the past are before us as an open book. It is ours to profit by this record of experience. To this end, we must read it intelligently, taking careful account of all that went into the making of the record and yielding assent to its conclusions only in so far as the experiments upon which they were based seem to have been carried on under right conditions, and to have been rightly interpreted. Thus used with discriminating intelligence, the body of religious and theological tradition comes to us not as a burden retarding our progress, but as a bright light illuminating our way.

Not only so, but from the inductive point of view the record of past experience is invaluable. It furnishes the student a far broader basis of induction and thus renders him less liable to err. The life of one generation is all too short and the conditions under which it is lived too much alike the world over to furnish sufficient material for the study of religious experience. The history of religious thought makes good this defect.

The adoption of the inductive method in religion will mean open-mindedness on the part of the religious man. He will hold himself in readiness to readjust his religious opinions whenever increase of knowledge and deepening of experience shall make such change imperative. He will not regard himself as having already attained, but will be looking for new light to break forth from God's word and God's world. He will face the facts of life without fear or prejudice

and let them make their own impression upon his soul. Dogmatism and uncharitable judgment of divergent opinions will give place to an earnest desire to co-operate heartily with every sincere seeker after truth and righteousness.

The religion developed under these conditions will not be so much a hard-and-fast theological system as a life. Like every vital thing, it will adjust itself to and conquer its environment. It will be the expression of an ever-growing experience and will change from glory to glory. It will rejoice in a faith that knows wherein it has believed, and will have no cause for shame before any court. Based directly upon reality, as discovered in the facts of history and experience, such a religion will abhor cant. Sincerity will be of its very essence. Emphasis upon subscription to creeds and conformity to dogma will give place to enthusiasm for righteousness and love for truth. No man will feel any necessity to cultivate ecclesiastical appearances at the expense of religious integrity. He will be far more concerned that he shall have actual knowledge of God through personal communion with him than that he shall be able to formulate theories about the nature or attributes of Deity. Directness and simplicity will take the place of complexity and ingenuity, and the gain will be much every way. Contact with reality will engender, in this case as always, a world-conquering enthusiasm.